

Chesterfield Extension Office
6807 Mimms Loop, P.O. Box 146, Chesterfield, VA 23832
ph: 804-751-4401 fax: 804-751-0515

Grass Roots Program Publications



Proper Mowing for a Healthy Lawn



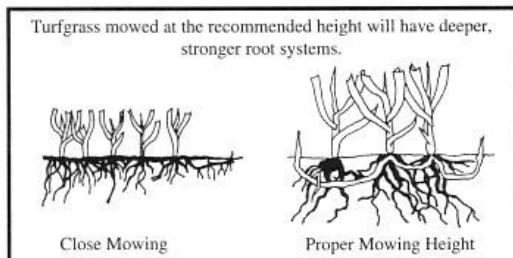
Susan Edwards, ANR Technician

Mowing is one of the most important cultural practices performed in lawn maintenance. Regardless of whether the lawn is fertilized, irrigated or receives applications of control products, proper mowing practices are essential if a high quality lawn is to develop.

Properly mowed lawns will have fewer weed populations, better moisture stress tolerance and generally better quality than lawns not properly mowed.

Mowing Heights

Mowing height is probably the most important parameter of mowing. Turfgrasses mowed at low heights have limited leaf area to sustain photosynthesis rates necessary to maintain good plant vigor. In general, a lawn mowed too short will have a shallow root system with little total root mass. Turfgrass mowed at the recommended height will have deeper, stronger root systems, and strong roots mean a healthier, stress-resistant lawn.



Higher mowing heights during the summer period will keep soil temperatures cooler, preserve soil moisture and help maintain turfgrass quality.

Mowing height can play an important role in prevention of lawn weed establishment.

Research has shown that higher mowing heights result in fewer weeds per unit area. This is due to higher grass providing more shading and competition to the weed seedlings during the initial establishment phases.

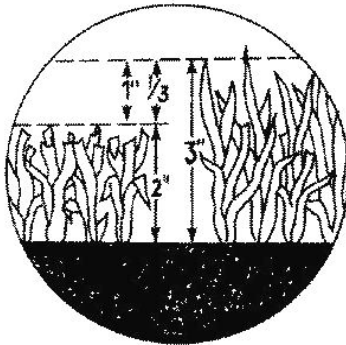
Turfgrass	Mowing Heights (inches)
Kentucky bluegrass	1 ½ to 2 ½
Tall fescue	2 to 3
Creeping red fescue	2 to 3
Perennial ryegrass	1 ½ to 2 ½
Bermudagrass	½ to 1
Zoysiagrass	¾ to 1

Mowing Frequency

Frequent mowing is best – so that no more than 1/3 of the blade is removed at a time. This may mean mowing more than once a week during periods of active turfgrass growth. Proper mowing frequency is essential to a healthy lawn – mowing infrequent and removing more than 1/3 of the blade at a time will stress the grass,

decrease root growth, and make your lawn more vulnerable to weeds.

If extended wet periods prevent timely mowing and the turfgrass gets excessively tall, move the mower height adjustment to the highest setting and mow the lawn. Once the clippings dry, lower the height adjustment to the desired height and then mow the lawn a second time in a different direction. This approach is termed "Double Cutting."



The "1/3 Mowing Rule" of blade removal.

Mow When Dry

Turfgrass should be mowed when it is dry. Wet grass is more difficult to cut and has the tendency to clog under rotary mowers. Mowing should not, however, be delayed for long periods of time because the grass is wet.

Mowing Directions

The direction of mowing should be altered every one to two mowings. Mowing at right angles (90 degrees) to the previous direction will help prevent the grass from repeatedly being pushed in one direction and laying over, an important consideration at high mowing heights. Also if scalping areas of the lawn is a problem, the different mowing directions will help minimize continual scalping in any one area.

Free Fertilizer!

Leaving your grass clippings on your lawn each time you mow can provide the nutrients equal to one fertilizer application.

Turfgrass Clippings = No Thatch

Grass clippings are 90% water and break down quickly – fescue grass clippings do not contribute to thatch when proper mowing practices are followed.

Keep That Blade Sharp!

Using a dull blade causes excess leaf damage and depletes the plant's stored reserves during the stress-filled summer months. Eventually the plant is not able to heal the mowing wound. The open wound becomes a site of fungal entry, leading to a diseased lawn.



Dull Mower Blade Damage to Lawn

Fall Mowing Practices

During the Fall period, mowing should continue as long as the turfgrass is actively growing. If the maintenance height is 2.5 inches during the fall period, it is permissible to lower the height to 2.0 inches during the last 1 to 2 mowings of the year.

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